DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 349 186 SO 021 842

AUTHOR Zepper, John T.
TITLE On the Road to a New School.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Educational Reform in International Perspective Conference (March 22, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; *Educational Development; *Educational History; Educational Objectives; Educational Philosophy; *Educational Policy; *Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Higher Education
IDENTIFIERS Gorbachev (Mikhail); *USSR

ABSTRACT

Reform of the Soviet Union's educational system was begun again in the 1980s under Mikhail Gorbachev with the goal of educating the Soviet citizen to function effectively in a newly restructured economy. This paper takes stock of the efforts to reform Soviet schools undertaken between 1984 and 1990. Soviet educators recognized that reconstruction of social and economic life, the reconstruction of secondary and higher education, and the course of reform of the entire educational system were intertwined. Among the problems with Soviet schools cited by educators were the lack of funding for education, poor facilities, the poor health of Soviet children, and the lack of relevance to their lives with which students viewed their education. The social studies teaching was in a state of crisis because students and educators questioned the value of teaching the communist ideology. The rigid academic curriculum in Soviet schools was cited as a further problem. Only 2.8% of the curriculum was devoted to electives; consequently, much of the curriculum has become useless and formalized for the students. Other problem areas discussed included vocational education, teacher education and training, and problems related to ethnic groups. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED349786

On the Road to a New School

John T. Zepper

University of New Mexico

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
JOHN T. ZEPPER
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SO 021 842

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

On the Road to a New School

John T. Zepper

University of New Mexico

Thrice within the brief 72-year history of the Soviet Union Soviet education has embarked upon the road to a new school in the creation of the New Man. The first journey began with the attempt to dismantle the Czarist educational system in order to create the first Marxist school system. Under the leadership of Lenin, Lunacharskii, Krupskaya, Blonskii, Shatskii, Pistrak, Pinkevich, and others, Soviet educators began experimentation with the complex system, projects, children's collective leadership and discipline, and many other progressive education projects, some of which were patterned after Western models. These experiments were short lived, their end beginning with the advent of Stalin's power and programs, and were burried by the return to many of the formal educational practices of the pre-Revolutionary regimes. A conservative educational philosophy, which resulted in the formal 10-year school, dominated the Soviet educational system during the dictatorial rule of Stalin (1924-1953). After the attempts at collective leadership and the consolidation of Party leadership under Khrushchev, the second journey toward a new school began with the 1958 Khrushchev School Reforms trying to reverse the ossification of the academic school. Just as the first road traveled was tied to the New Economic Policy, the Khruschchev School Reform was linked to creating new economic developments. Even the Russian word *perestroika* (reconstruction) was used during this change period (1958-1964). Many of the new patterns of schooling were returns to the experiments of the early 1920's--poly-technical education, *internats,* proletarianizing higher education, and socially useful labor. Unfor-tunately, the Khrushchev reforms were like a vaccination which did not take, resulting in the rise of the Brezhnev regime (1964-1982) which returned to many of the school practices of the Stalin years. After Brezhnev's death and because of a stagnant economy, Andropov, Chernenko, and Gorbachev again embarked on the road to a new school in order to create the Soviet citizen who would be able to function effectively in a newly reconstructed economy. As we enter the sixth year on the road to a new school (1984-1990), it is time to take stock of the Gorbachev school reforms. Although there has been much optimism and some changes in the Soviet society connected with *glasnost'* and *petrestroika,* attempting to change the social, economic, governmental, and Party bureaucracy can be compared to a swimmer trying to negotiate the entire Mississippi River at flood stage going upstream.

Both the Soviet Union and the United States began a journey toward school reform because of relatively weak economies at almost the same time. The United States trip, motivated

by the declining of a world-wide competitive economy, was spurred on by the 1983 "A Nation at Risk" report issued by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. A proliferation of top-down, fragmented reform reports and proposals hit the newsstands during the 1980's. Consensus is that, despite the volume of rhetoric and legislation, a minimal amount of actual reform has been accomplished. In much of the reform literature, critics of American public schooling, possibly to vent their anger on some scapegoat, have turned to teacher bashing--denigrating, deprecating, defaming, depreciating, and disparaging teachers and their efforts. In effect, they were belittling the very people who were necessary to implement any reform plan or were implying that anyone with an Arts and Sciences college degree could become a successful and effective teachers and should replace those already on the firing line. About one year after the "A Nation at Risk" report, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union approved "The Basic Guidelines for Reform in the General Education and Vocational Schools"[1] on April 10, 1984. In addition to the restructuring of the school system and improvements of school conditions, the guide stressed that the reforms in society depended extensively on teachers' "ideological convictions, professional skills, erudition and culture;" however, there was no teacher bashing in the guidelines. Even though the guidelines recognized the need for significant improvement in teacher education and further improvements for advanced teacher training, teachers were recognized as "the sculptors of the spititual world of young individuals" and the people to whom society entrusted "its most cherished, most valued possession--children, its hope and its future."[2]

Teaching was referred to as a "most noble and most difficult profession" demanding "constant creativity, tireless brain work, enormous spiritual generosity, love for children and boundless devotion to the cause." Citizens of the USSR had "profound gratitude and respect" for the selfless work of Soviet teachers.[3] None assumed that anyone could teach effectively, because the substantial expansion of admissions to teacher education required "young people who have shown an inclination for work with children."

Two summer trips to Moscow, Kishinev, Vilnius, and Leningrad (1988 and 1989) plus popular translations of Russian publications have convinced me that much needs to be accomplished to implement the *perestoika* of Soviet education. In conversations with Soviets, the intelligentsia were engrossed in issues related to *glasnost'* (openness, freedom of thought), while the average Soviet citizen was more interested in *perestroika,* meaning more consumer goods, a greater diversity and supply of food, and shorter lines. On the other hand, both groups agreed that Soviet schooling still had huge difficiencies for *perestoika* in society. Now that the masses of

Soviet youth, including nationalities (ethnic groups), attend school, it is no longer possible to teach the same formal academic curriculum effectively and efficiently to all children.

Soviet educators have recognized that the reconstruction of social and economic life, the course of reconstruction of secondary and higher education, and the course of the reform of the entire educational system are intertwined. Rather than premature cosmetic changes and arguments, similar to what has been going on in American public schooling in the 1980's, Soviet educators have realized the need to strengthen their convictions in the correct concrete path of reform--the search for an orientation for reconstructing the schools. In order to determine the correct, concrete road, all concrete paths which may achieve renewal of the educational system must be considered.[5]

"In order to reconstruct the social and economic life in the USSR, the personal qualities of the people must be changed--attitudes toward work, interest in society, and preparation for self-directed organization."[6] There is no quick fix for such a change--no talisman, no magic wand, no medieval elixir, no panacia--only the long hard road of education could implement such personality changes.

N. Shchurkova warned about *glasnost'* deriding old values and holding the past to ridicule and scorn. She believed that writers, publishers, editors, the film, and the thearter, with no roots in the past, are not concerned about the "truth" but only their own pocketbooks. These intellectuals were labled "savages" with no history, no culture. Selfish elite schools (for "Lomonosovs") demand a five-day school in order for parents and children to take advantage of their *dacha* or resort holidays; however, the average Soviet parent cannot do this.[7] I. Ovchinnikova agreed that Shchurkova's letter reflected teachers' sentiments accurately, but she observed that living in freedom is no easy task. Compared with a taste of freedom during the Khrushchev thaw, teachers don't have to stop discussions of burning issues under *glasnost'* nor do they give up their right to their own opinions; no longer should they remain in silence. Although this movement will put no soap on the shelves nor sausage on the table, everything worthwhile is gained--human dignity. The current sexual revolution will run its course, and the people will return to the necessary civic culture. Under *glasnost'* every student should have a chance to show what talents s/he has, because the future needs children with wide-open eyes.[8]

The chair of the USSR State Committee on Public Education, G.A. Yagodin, lamented that there was practically no increase in the national budget spent on education over the last decade, the poor facilities in 50% of the schools, two-shift schools for a quarter of Soviet children, and no

kindergartens for 1.5 million children. In addition, the national language problem is an unresolved issue. Since no more than 20% of secondary school graduates will be admitted into higher education, all students must be prepared for life, to earn a living, in the new society. Further he noted that 53% of Soviet children are unhealthy and that their health declined during their school years; consequently, Yagodin concluded that schools must provide physical activity for all children.[9] This list of deficiencies in Soviet school could be extended almost indefinitely. For example, the following are some other problems noted in another source:

1. Students who do poorly in school subjects because the education they have received does not have any worth to them.

2. Almost 69% of the students are interested in tekhnikums.

3. Students whose contact with the cultural life of society is unimportant and which they do not intend to deepen.

4. Students poorly oriented toward self-realization.

5. Students who have an undeveloped preparation for vocational choices.[10] Along the lines of these last problems, five types of senior students in Estonian schools were described by research, indicating some of the problems in meeting students' needs in the old, formal, academic secondary schools.

1. These rather passive students combine an undifferentiated personality direction with this inactivity. Their progress is despicable, and the majority of academic subjects seem to be difficult for them. Rarely do they pass their subjects without a valid reason. Half have a possitive appraisal of their relationship with teachers, while the other half considered it a mediocre relationship.

2. The "critical intellectual" has a strong orientation to values and school, but a lower appreciation of applied knowledge. In addition, this group of students have a profound interest in culture. Pedagogically this group of students are highly contradictory. Their good results in studies and active participation in areas of culture are combined with an inner dissatisfaction and a critical attitude toward school, home conditions, and surrounding life.

3. The "intellectual" with an active life attitude is favorable to the school. This type of students, who has great cognitive interests, demonstrates maximumly favorable emotional ties to

the school and submits willingly to the requirements of the school. Various reference books are used by them, and they manifest great interest in using massive information on the news of international life, popularized scientific materials, and various cultural problems.

4. "Practical" students, with an active life attitude, have deep cognitive interests, a willing submissiveness to school demands, and a striving to utilize knowledge learned in school. These students prefer mathematics, physics, and history. They take more difficult subjects than representatives of types 2 and 3.

5. The intellectually passive students differ sharply in direction from the others. Their representatives have difficulty in submitting to school requirements, have more negative ties with the school, while the practical applications of knowledge does not excite them. Further, they are not notable for their love of work, their interest in values and education, and their love of mental work. About 61% of them get no higher than 3.5 on the 5.0 grading scale.[11]

Indoctrination in ideology and political attitudes have also come into critical examination. There is a crisis in social studies teaching which has been wrong for decades. The state of the social studies curriculum, both in the secondary school and in higher education, has cause for alarm. Students are disallusioned with CPSU history (Fundamentals of Scientific Communism) and the discrepancies between reality and "scientific principles." A conscientious student on the state examinations in Marxism-Leninism defends the statement that "The nationalities question has been resolved" when all social experience refutes such a statement. Although 46% of the students at Kursk Agricultural Institute thought it a good idea to stop teaching the history of the CPSU and 32% thought that it should be elective, 72% believed that all truly educated people should know the content of this course. G. Kutsev noted that the reassessment of the Communist movement would be painful and disallusioning to students, but both he and Yu. Vorobyov believed that the content should be improved by historians and public affairs experts with some departmental discression allowed in choosing half of the content.[12] S.A. Fedolova stated that the new system of instruction was not being implemented and called for a new syllabus and textbooks for history to be created by scholars quickly to replace incorrect and distorted parts and to avoid slogans and rote answers to examinations.[13] Even children in the Young Pioneers, under the auspices of their controlling organizations--the State Committee on Public Education, trade unions, the State Committee on Radio and Television, and the All-Union Young Communist League-- are affected by *glasnost'*, feeling an alienation from the Young Pioneers and desiring a say in its activities, to be able to choose for themselves. They are lost in the pomp within the organization and dependent upon the

leaders. The Young Pioneer organization has not recognized the need to democratize its formalism.[14]

Formerly ideological-political development of students meant active participation in political information and political events, but this is not the essence of the question. One must understand one's own place in the diversity of political, economic and social conditions, which demands an individualized approach. This instruction must have a fundamental cognitive character and emotional value. The curriculum must use the students' real life conditions in order to make learning more meaningful.[15]

Much of the problems in Soviet schools can be traced to the rigid academic curriculum. Only 2.8 % of the curriculum is devoted to electives; consequently, much of the curriculum has become useless and formalized for the students.

1. Integrated (syncretic) subjects (Native language, local lore, fundamentals of family life)	7.5%
2. Communications (Native language, Russian, foreign language)	26.5%
3. Labor education	18.7%
4. Fine arts (Literature, art, music)	10.4%
5. Basic sciences (Mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy, geography and natural history)	26.1%
6. Subjects with axiological directions (History, social studies, fundamentals of the Soviet government and laws)	5.1%
7. Physical education	5.7%
	100% [16]

The academic plans and programs are vital for *perestroika;* consequently, we must examine the curriculum to meet the needs of all students, as well as the system of education and its structure.

There is a need to develop a model of the new school for fundamental directions in restructuring the educational system--an experimental curriculum, what type of learners are needed, the ties between science and practice, and control and self-control in renewing education.17

Problems related to nationalities (ethnic groups) in public education have not been solved. Considering recent events in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, White Russia, Moldavia, the Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and the Central Asian republics, the depth of national urges and antagonisms become more readily apparent. A backlash against national minorities in the USSR, resembling the anti-affirmative action views of many in the USA, are illustrated by the views of I. Ovchinnikova. She believes that all applicants to higher education should pass competitive screening at high levels and that it is time to stop noncompetitive admissions to higher education institutions for indigenous (non-Russian) peoples. If any allowances are made, it would be for lack of knowledge of Russian; but she also proposes that the nation should invest money in the school system so that all students would have a highly educated teacher with modern methods of instruction and school facilities for even the backward rural districts.18 On the other hand, nationalities demand official language status for the indigenous languages, saying no to Russian, developing new local textbooks, and fostering true bilingualism among both the indigenous populations and Russians in national republics.19 M. Vsevolodova believes that the Soviet Union could avoid the Byelorussian language demise under N.S. Khrushchev's policy and Stalin's order on Central Asian languages by worrying about the fate of national languages and by considering the Soviet homeland as "some kind of communal apartment." She also believes that the fluency in the indigenous langauges in Central Asia exhibited by Russian scholars in the 1920's and 1930's was a worthwhile example for contemporary Soviet national policy. Russians need to learn more than a few polite phrases; they must become fluent in two languages to be really labled as bilingual.20

Structural changes in the Soviet school reform were designed to enhance the role of vocational education for the 80% of students who will not gain admission to higher educational institutions and to supply trained workers for the national economy. A recent law has made it possible for Soviet 14-year olders to work in the economy, not only during vacation periods, at jobs which pose no health risks. While on vacation, these students may work 24 hours per week up to four hours a day, but this schedule is reduced by one-half when school is in session. Those 16-17 years of age may work up to 36 hours per week, not more that six hours per day; however, neither group will receive a full-day's pay for part-time work, an elimination of past legislation. In addition, this work in the productive economy will count for "practical school work,"21 thus resembling distributive education programs in the USA.

Recently higher education became freer for students with the approval of "Resolutions on Institutions of Higher Education."[22] In this document, the goal of higher education was to become the development of the individual rather than the mass preparation of specialists. During the second year of study, students will have the right to attend lectures of their choice. Students in their final year of study will have the choice of three to four disciplines of study within their field of specialization. Earlier in 1987 students were allowed to elect their own to academic and institute councils.

Estonian teacher educators have asked the question whether the teachers, who are to be the implementors of school reform, are ready for *perestroika*. For over 25 years Estonian educational researchers have studied the personality of teachers, tracing how it has changed over the last 10 years (1978-1988) to determine whether they have the qualities for creative activity. They lacked originality, were emotionally unfulfilled, and were uncertain in the classroom. In the 1980's 70.5% of teachers believed their profession was unprestigious (63.7% in the 1970's), 54.6% thought their work more difficult (compared to 36.1% in the 1970's), 75.5% were very disappointed in their position (vs. 14.3% in the 1970's), 67% said that students were more difficult to deal with (22.3%), and 73.4% of teachers seldom received joy from their achievements (12.4%). Good teachers quickly and flexibly adapted to new conditions and create democratic educational conditions.[23]

In Estonia during the 1986-87 school year, there were 14,100 female teachers (83.2%) and 2,900 male teachers (16.8%), similar to the situation throughout the USSR. The average teacher's age in this republic was 40.2 years old, indicating the need to train many replacement teachers into the 21st Century. These teacher educators noted the extreme stress on 46.4% of the teachers and stressed the need for forming creative character traits in future teachers and in the retraining of teachers in the field to use creative activities. Since only four percent of all teachers are "Honored Teachers," "Teacher-Methodists," or "Senior Teachers," the training and retraining of teachers are a severe problem for *pertestroika* of the academic plan and the entire academic-upbringing process of children and youth.[24]

To solve this problem, All preparation programs would become five-year teacher training courses organized in the following system:

Pedagogical Science[25]

Research Courses:	Theoretical Courses:	System of methodological work:
Research Institute of Pedagogical Sciences	I--Upbringing work II--Psychology III--Subjects and methods V--Theory and methods of academic-upbringing work V--Ethics and exchange of pedagogical experiments of teacher-methodist courses	Subject commission Creative assets of instructor-leaders Scientific management from the view of chairs of district systematic themes

This entire system of teacher education relates to the theoretical courses and applies to both preservice teachers and reeducation of teachers in the field. As one can see, new research is fundamental to the success of this system. Officials have recognized this and know that the personnel of the former USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences must be changed and upgraded; therefore, the Poliburo adopted the USSR Council of Ministers proposal to reorganize the USSR Academy of Pedagogy which is accountable to the USSR State Committee on Public Education. The election of new members, the President, and the Presidium were scheduled in November-December 1988. They were to develop guidelines for new research efforts and to review the network of research institutions and certification of researchers.[26]

To reform Soviet and American education, teacher education and retraining of teachers must produce the type of flexible, adaptive, creative teacher necessary for the reconstruction of both educational systems.

---

[1] "Basic Guidelines for the School Reform," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40 (May 30, 1984): 12-20.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[3] *Loc. cit.*

[5] E.R. Grenchkina, Kh.I. Liimets, V.K. Russ, and others. *Na puti k novoi shkole: Opyt perestroika narodnogo obrazovaniya v Estonskoi SSR.* Moskva: Pedagogika, 1988. pp. 3-4.

[6] *Ibid.,* p. 29.

[7] "Glasnost: Bane or Boon for Education?" *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41 (December 27, 1989): 16-17.

[8] *Ibid.,* p. 17.

[9] G.A. Yagodin. *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40 (September 21, 1988): 15,24.

[10] Grechkina, *op. cit.,* pp. 44-45.

[11] *Ibid.,* pp. 48-56.

[12] "Without Slogans and Incantations." *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41 (August 23, 1989): 35

[13] "Teacher Calls for New History Texts; . . . " *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40 (August 10, 1988): 10,18, and "There Will Be an Exam, But There Still Are No Textbooks." *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41 (March 8, 1989): 27.

[14] "Heirs Without Rights." *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40 (August 31, 1988): 19-20.

[15] Grechkina, *op. cit.,* pp. 57-61.

[16] *Ibid.,* p. 64.

[17] *Ibid.,* pp. 90-128.

[18] "Preferential Treatment, or Coddling?" *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41 (1989): 23-24.

[19] *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41 (October 4, 1989): 25; 41 (September 27, 1989): 5; 41 (February 15, 1989): 27-28; and M. Vsevolodova, "Bilingualism: An All-Round Program Asked." *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41 (April 5, 1989): 10-11.

[20] Vsevolodova, *op. cit.,* p. 11.

[21] "The Right To Work at the Age of 14." *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40 (August 17, 1988): 27.

[22] "Unrestricted Freedom." *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41 (September 20, 1989): 32.

[23] Grechkina, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 130-135.

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 118-118.

[26] "In the CPSU Central Committee and USSR Council of Ministers." *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40 (September 14, 1988): 18.